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ABSTRACT

Unions are natural providers of basic skills instruction. They are in daily workplace contact with their membership, are trusted to work on members' behalf, and speak the language of the worker. Unions are trying to address the needs of illiterate workers through collective bargaining arrangements in which employers contribute a percentage of their payroll for the training and upgrading of their workers. Such programs may be jointly administered by unions and management, which may provide the instruction directly or contract it out. Unions may independently seek the services of the adult basic education programs. Other alternatives include partnerships between unions, employers, education providers, and state administrative agencies. A preeminent collective bargaining model is the United Auto Workers-Ford Motor Company Employee Development and Training Program. It is both job-related and concerned with the personal growth of the individual. Eight smaller unions banded together in New York City to form the Consortium for Worker Literacy, which provides education to help workers maintain current jobs or retrain for new ones before job loss. The AFL-CIO is exploring the use of a cutting-edge curriculum, the Job Skills Education Program, built on the analysis of job tasks and the basic skills required for them. Union members also participate in planning bodies and sit on private industry councils. (YLB)

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BCEL BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY

ADULT LITERACY: PROGRAMS • PLANNING • ISSUES

A Newsletter For The Business Community

NO. 13 OCTOBER 1987

UNIONS: BREAD, BUTTER & BASIC SKILLS

To a far greater degree than is generally realized, the classroom is an adjunct of the union hall. In cities and regions across the country, hundreds of thousands of men and women take part in union-sponsored education programs tailored to the particular goals, needs, and conditions of their lives.

These programs provide a comprehensive range of adult study options from basic literacy to trade courses to college and university degrees. Except for the great scale of program offerings and the mass of people being served, there is nothing new about labor's involvement in education. That commitment is as old as the labor movement itself. It was organized labor, in fact, that was chiefly responsible for the American system of universal free public schools in the early 19th Century.

But now, with the nature of jobs undergoing radical change, there is a new urgency to worker education. Intense global competition, decline in manufacturing and the rise of service industries, shifts in the geography of production, and an explosion of technology not seen since the Industrial Revolution are transforming the workplace–and with it, bringing disastrous consequences to great masses of jobholders.

The Office of Technology Assessment of the U.S. Congress reports that 11.5 million Americans lost their jobs between 1979 and 1984. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that two million more continue to be laid off each year. Noting that huge numbers lack the basic skills to adapt to change and secure new jobs, AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, at the Federation's first national conference on education and training in 1986, called for "an adult education program on a scale and of a design never tried before." He said that "unions will be going to the bargaining table to negotiate learning programs and learning time along with work time."

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A major 1980 study by researcher Larry Mikulecky of Indiana University found that 70 percent of the reading material in a cross section of jobs is between 9th and 12th grade level in difficulty, and 15 percent is even higher. Yet other work by Mikulecky suggests that 1 out of every 5 present U.S. workers reads below 8th grade level–and 1 out of every 8 reads only at 4th-grade level.

The auto mechanic who repaired your car in the past must now be able to deal with the microcomputer that controls its operations. The passive bank teller who once sat behind the window and performed a narrow series of tasks is now an up-front "customer service representative" who sells a whole array of services. The tool and die maker whose powerful hand-eye coordination once made him king of the blue-collar manufacturing world has been replaced by a robot whose hand-eye coordination is even better. Now less a craftsman and more a technician, his work consists of managing the laborer who once did the heavy lifting for him, the materials handler who moved parts

UAW Local 259 English Class–Lunchroom At Manhattan Industrial Electronics Hardware

and tracked the inventory, the repair mechanic, and so on. The depth of the single skill required for his old job has given way to a wider breadth of responsibilities that require different, broader skills.

At the same time, many workers are being de-skilled; deprived of judgment and initiative by mechanical programming–and often at a sub-minimum wage for young workers to go with it. "They are described politely as 'entry-level' jobs," says Lane Kirkland, "but in most cases the entrance leads to nowhere but the back door...In fast food places today, the cash registers don't even have keys with numbers on them–only pictograms that the worker will see in no other place the rest of his life."

Technology isn't the only factor altering the work environment. The basic production model in use for most of this century is being restructured and turning upside down what was once do-able with low levels of literacy. New decentralized systems of teamwork, Japanese- and Swedish-style, are giving workers more autonomy and decision-making authority, which in turn calls for higher-order skills: critical thinking, identifying and solving problems, working in collaboration, setting goals, speaking and writing competently. Some companies are already requiring workers to take special courses on problem-solving in group settings.

In a period that is equally troubled for employers, employees, and their communities, unions are a natural as providers of basic skills instruction. They are in daily workplace contact with their membership. They are trusted to work on their members' behalf. And, most important, they speak the language of the working man and woman.

(cont'd on p. 4)

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UNIONS (cont'd from p. 1)

Addressing these issues in a recent talk, AFL-CIO's secretary-treasurer Thomas Donahue noted: "We always boast about our role in supporting education, and we have long been involved with literacy training. Many of our unions grew with the waves of successive immigration to this country and they developed literacy programs for their new members. Not initially for job reasons, but for citizenship and family reasons.

"In a later time we developed more emphasis on training to upgrade our members' skills and we fought for the training necessary to enable workers to move up career ladders. In the construction trades and the printing industry, our unions and the employers were and remain the custodians of the nation's apprenticeship programs and the gateway to skilled craft jobs." (Note: There are 237,000 registered apprentices in 42,000 programs in the building trades alone.)

"We're still doing those things, but we've also recognized that the days when strong hands were enough are gone....We've discovered the frequency of the disguised illiteracy among men and women who've been in the workforce for a number of years, have masked their insufficiency in one way or another, and now have to acquire those skills. Our unions are trying to address these new needs in a variety of ways."

Among them are collective bargaining arrangements in which employers contribute a percentage of their payroll for the training and upgrading of their workers. Such programs may be jointly administered by unions and management which may provide the instruction directly or contract it out to a private or public education provider. Another pattern is one in which unions independently seek the services of adult basic education programs available in community colleges and school districts. Still others involve partnerships between unions, employers, education providers, and state administrative agencies--of which private industry councils are one example. Some of these approaches are described here.

The Collective Bargaining Arena

A pre-eminent collective bargaining model is the United Auto Workers-Ford Motor Company Employee Development and Training Program (EDTP). EDTP is regarded by some as pathbreaking because it was the first venture of its kind on so grand a scale that was both job-related and concerned with the personal growth of the individual.

It was created at the bargaining table in 1982, with a funding mechanism and an organizational framework that set a pattern for unions in other large industries. Financing was to come from a Nickel Fund: 5 cents an hour to be paid by the company for each hour worked by hourly employees, an amount doubled in 1984 to generate $120 million over the next three years to serve UAW-Ford's 109,000 displaced and active hourly workers. The initial mandate was: "to help workers grow, upgrade their education, learn new skills, and expand their personal and career horizons." But it was agreed that the program would be built from the elicited interests of the workers themselves. What evolved took shape as six different avenues for training, retraining, and personal growth, including a Basic Skills Enhancement Program.

Since 1983, some 45,000 members have participated in the various programs. Of these, 5,000 have been in basic skills programs at 35 locations around the country. Virtually all classes are located at plant sites, and they are conducted by instructors from the local two- and four-year colleges.

The Skills Enhancement Program is jointly administered from a national headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan by both union and company representatives and a professional staff. The national center staff provides guidance and support for the local projects at the plants, each of which is also locally governed by union and management representatives. The national staff provides a structure by which the local programs can identify the interests of their members and the local providers who can best serve those interests. It also helps tie the local programs in with federal ABE monies or state aid where available.

One Of Several Ford Learning Centers For UAW Employee Education Activities

Learning is self-paced, with much computer-aided and computer-managed instruction. Scheduling is flexible, with entry and exit whenever convenient to the individual. Along with standard materials, teachers are expected and helped to develop customized curricula related to the individual's work and personal life. After consulting with the local joint union-management committee, that curriculum is submitted to the national center for approval. "We're not going to sit here in Dearborn and tell them in Nashville or Tulsa what they're going to teach. They have to decide that themselves and then do it with our assistance," says George Valso, associate director of the company's national center. Rick Martinez, his UAW counterpart, adds that "the key to success of all the programs is that they are worker driven."

Collective bargaining agreements that cover education and training are not new. Some date back a decade or more. The recent surge of activity around them is a response to the changing economic climate. How many people participate in programs made possible through such contracts is not known. The size of the total eligible pool from which they come is not known either. But a few examples suggest the magnitude of the enterprise.

- UAW-General Motors operates a $200 million-a-year program for its 305,000 members.
- UAW-Chrysler offers 14 separate programs to 75,000 workers relating to interpersonal, job-related, and basic skills education.
- The United Steelworkers of America, where nearly a half million workers lost their jobs in the last decade, operates more than 50 centers offering comprehensive training. Nearly 27,000 persons are presently enrolled.
- The Communications Workers of America, with a reduction of 70,000 workers in the past three years, negotiated a contract with AT&T in 1986 that furnishes $6-7 million annually for education and training. The jointly-governed program, though new, is already operational in 60 locations throughout the U.S. Over 1,000 persons are enrolled, of whom 10 percent are thus far studying basic skills.
- Since the early 1970's, Philadelphia's Hospital and Health Care District 1199C has been operating a training and upgrading program. Half of its present $2 million budget is derived from employers in medical and allied health institutions who contribute one percent of their payroll; the other half comes from foundation and public funds.

Other unions with similar contracts include District Council 37, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, New York City (1971); District 1199, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, New York (1969); the Amalgamated Service and Allied Industries Joint Board, New York (1976); The Seafarers International Union at Piney Point, Maryland; the Service Employees International Union; and the Graphics Communications International Union.

(Note: A compilation of the education provisions in these contracts is available from the Human Resources Development Institute, AFL-CIO, 815 16th Street, Washington, D.C. 20006.)

Banding Together: Consortium For Worker Literacy

Big-league unions in the giant industries like auto, steel, or communications, can command impressive education funds from employers. But what can smaller unions do--those in small industries or seasonal businesses where employers are in no position to support education?

One answer is the inventive strategy of the Consortium for Worker Literacy, devised by a group of eight unions that banded together in New York City to achieve what would have been difficult or impossible individually. They are the Teamsters Joint Council 16, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the United Auto Workers District Council 65, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees District 1707, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, United Auto Workers Local 259, the Health and Hospital Workers Union District Council 1199, and the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union.

The unions vary greatly in size, the smallest with a membership of 4,000 and the largest 150,000. But the Consortium estimates that 50 percent of its combined workers and their family members in need of literacy skills comprise a pool of 450,000 persons. (The spouses of union members and their children over 18 are served as well, with an eye toward intervention in the cycle of illiteracy passed from one generation to the next.) With the clout derived from these numbers, a savvy plan, and its ability to provide students and locations, the Consortium requested from the State Department of Education, the Municipal Assistance Corporation, and the New York City Board of Education, the use of public funds appropriated for adult education. They received $1.5 million, upped to $2 million the following year, and launched operations in 1985.

The program has two fundamental premises. One is the importance of providing education to help workers maintain current jobs or retrain for new ones before job loss--to be preventive rather than reactive. This differs sharply from the policy of the Job Training Partnership Act, the nation's largest program for

aid to dislocated workers. JTPA provides training only for those persons who are already unemployed or have been informed that they will be--a policy consistently opposed by labor and JTPA practitioners. The psychological and financial stress of joblessness are poor conditions for effective learning, and the lack of a workplace robs the instruction of a meaningful context. But most workers aren't told, or told early enough, that they are about to be jobless.

(A noteworthy report on plant closings in 1983-84 by the U.S. General Accounting Office states that in plants with over 100 employees, two-thirds of employers provided two weeks advance notice of layoff or less, with half of these providing no advance notice at all. *[Dislocated Workers: Extent of Business Closures, Layoffs, and the Public and Private Response.]* Bills to remedy this problem have been introduced into every Congress since 1974 but have failed to pass. The fate of the Metzenbaum-Kennedy provisions included in the currently-pending Omnibus Trade Bill, calling for 60 days advance notice, is still uncertain. Moreover, reports the GAO, no more than 5-7 percent of eligible displaced workers are being served by JTPA, and the average length of remedial instruction in all JTPA programs is only two weeks.)

The second premise of the Consortium, based on research that shows learning to be most effective when it occurs in a functional context, is that all curricula should be built around the occupational themes and life experiences of the various union memberships.

The coup in the Consortium's partnership with its funding and education agencies was that it was able to win relative autonomy to tailor programs to a pedagogical philosophy that, in its own judgment, would best suit the unions' members. One result is that care has been taken to hire teachers sensitive to the struggles of the students and to their need for dignity. In addition, it has been possible to use an interactive teaching style, which includes peer teaching and a buddy-support system. Class sites--union halls, factories, housing projects, churches--have been chosen for their physical convenience and psychological comfort, free from intimidating facilities where many before have failed. Flexible hours and schedules have been set--before, between, after shifts, and on weekends. And a variety of instructional materials are used including those generated by the students.

Two work-related curricula have already been developed for teaching basic skills to firemen and to exterminators, with the goal of the instruction to enable the workers to pass a test for promotion. The content of job manuals served as the basis for constructing reading comprehension, vocabulary, and other language arts. "For many workers," comments Anthony Alvarado, former head of the Consortium, "the worker literacy program is not a dream deferred and not something that may come about in the future. It is a very clear statement that if you pass this examination you can then move up in your job rank to where you can earn $8,000 or $9,000 more a year than you are presently earning. That is a very powerful motivational tool."

The Consortium has been able to choose its own consultants from the City University of New York faculty for on-going staff development. An outgrowth of this was an arrangement for graduate-level course credit for teachers in the program, taught at CUNY. Fifty Consortium teachers enrolled. The Consortium paid for the course. The Consortium also works with CUNY to develop research on questions of direct concern to its basic skills efforts (e.g. can shop stewards be used effectively as para-professional teachers in literacy instruction?).

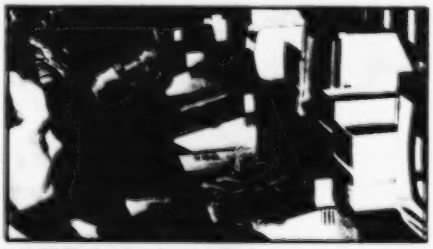
A recent UAW Local 259 newspaper article, called "*Education Classes Come to the Shops*," conveys a bit of the flavor. "Our students not only are learning basic and advanced skills of reading, writing, and math, and science and history, but participate actively in developing curriculum ideas. They write oral histories of their lives, their cultural backgrounds, their union experience, their lives in the shop.....Students describe how they are beginning to speak up at union meetings, how they now can talk to their boss and the landlord and the doctor, how the classes give them a greater feeling of self-confidence, how proud their families are of their achievement. The program is a labor of love for our union and we are committed to expand it."

One measure of the program's success is that Consortium activities now comprise one-third of the total adult education classes provided by the New York City Board of Education.

"But it couldn't have happened without the strength of the Consortium," says director Joseph McDermott. "If a single union had sought help, it would have been told to send its members to conventional adult basic education evening classes. Unions have to use their clout to make the system work for them. The official agencies say 'You fit into our rules and regulations.' They grade students, they characterize them, their understanding of hours and schedules is irrelevant. We have an obligation to educate these agencies and get them to respond to the real world."

AFL-CIO Activities

Meanwhile, back at the main AFL-CIO offices, the Human Resources Development Institute (HRDI), its training and employment arm, operates regional offices which provide information and technical assistance related to employment training. HRDI also designs and operates model programs for dislocated workers, and is presently operating 12 such centers in six states. Of these, five are using computers for individualized, competency-based instruction. HRDI reports that students like these "high tech one-room schoolhouses."



Laid-Off Steelworkers Improve Their Basic Skills, HRDI, Baton Rouge

HRDI is also exploring the use of a cutting-edge curriculum, the Job Skills Education Program, that is built on a finely-tuned analysis of job tasks and the basic skills required for them. Though developed for the military, the subject matter is equally relevant to civilian occupations. The program is being made available through a technology transfer program between the Departments of Defense, Education, and Labor.

In addition, a demonstration learning lab is being established at the AFL-CIO's George Meany Center for Labor Studies in Silver Springs, Maryland. The center is a national training academy for labor leaders and staff personnel from around the country, who now will have the opportunity to see basic skills training in operation.

Developing The Potential

Unions are contributing to the nation's literacy effort in a great variety of other ways. They are increasingly a part of urban and statewide planning bodies as, for example, in Illinois, where that state's exemplary Literacy Council recently formed a Business and Labor Literacy Advisory Committee to help labor and management connect with local literacy providers for workplace reading programs. Twenty such programs are already underway in plants across the state.

In addition, union representatives sit on hundreds of private industry councils around the country, bringing to them the knowledge and viewpoint of the people to be served.

In Massachusetts, the Workplace Education Initiative, now in its second year of operation, has in place 15 workplace literacy projects, 80 percent of which involve union-employer patnerships. The program, for still-on-the-job workers, was launched in recognition that functionally illiterate dislocated workers are not at the most teachable moment given the trauma of their unemployment and the concern about their life situation. This exemplary Initiative is sponsored by the state's Office of Economic Affairs, the Executive Office of Labor, and the Department of Education, with strong support from the Governor.

Clearly, many unions have a solid experience in job task analysis and related basic skills curiculum development. Programs now being developed by management could benefit from this experience. So could unions not yet involved but faced with the need to be. Beyond that, educational organizations are being turned to increasingly by employers and by unions for help in setting up employee basic skill programs. Many of the educational experts, through no fault of their own, lack specific knowledge of how to design job-related programs and teach them in workplace settings. These people can also learn from the accumulated experience and inside perspective of the unions already at the forefront.

The crisis facing American business and the workforce is a massive one and it won't go away. According to government, labor, and other analysts, the present problems are different from those of cyclical or general unemployment. Displacement of workers is now an on-going process associated with technological and economic change, and it is deeply imbedded in the de-industrialization of America.

Organized labor has called upon Congress to adopt policies that look to the modernization and revitalization of basic industries and a national program of improved education and training for American workers that will promote U.S. competitiveness, economic growth, and job security.

The view of organized labor is that developing a skilled, productive, adaptable workforce is a survival issue; that success at the bargaining table notwithstanding, the nation cannot depend on individual employers, or one-by-one collective bargaining arrangements, or on fragmented publicly-supported efforts for education and training. Other sectors agree. "We need to have a new, more comprehensive approach [to these problems]," recently said Roger Semerad, Assistant Secretary of Labor. He urged the labor movement "to offer us your expertise and your knowledge of the workforce in adapting our institutions to what lies ahead." ■